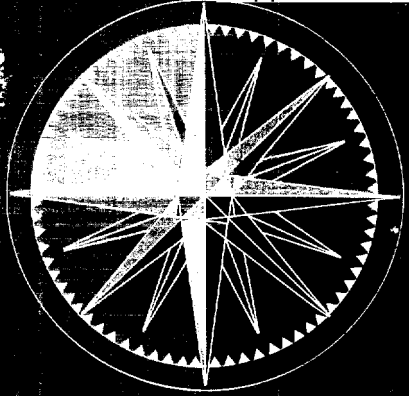


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Approved For Release 2008/11/06 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004400080002-6

17 April 1964

OCI No. 0327/64A
Copy No.



SPECIAL REPORT

COMMUNIST UNIONS GAIN IN INDIA'S LABOR MOVEMENT

State Dept. review completed.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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COMMUNIST UNIONS GAIN IN INDIA'S LABOR MOVEMENT

The Communist-dominated All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), India's second largest trade union federation, reportedly has abandoned the attitude of moderation it adopted after the Chinese Communist invasions of Indian territory in late 1962. AITUC now has opened a new offensive against the ruling Congress Party and the labor unions associated with it, especially the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the country's largest federation. INTUC appears to be in no condition to oppose the Communist attack effectively. AITUC may wean a significant number of adherents away from INTUC and make major gains in the labor field before government leaders in New Delhi are moved to take the problem in hand.

Labor and the "War Effort"

For some six months after the Chinese invasions of October 1962, Indian labor organizations acquiesced in the government's desire for industrial peace and cooperated in the defense effort. By mid-1963, however, the sense of national emergency had worn off, and labor leaders had come to feel that management had not adhered to the industrial truce as faithfully as had labor. A rash of demonstrations and strikes in the latter half of 1963, sparked by the labor wings of minor opposition parties, indicated that the situation had returned to "normal."

Labor unrest centered around the questions of high taxes and a compulsory "savings" scheme which the government had instituted during the emergency to encourage small savings. Agitation also hit at the government's apparent inability to

prevent marked price rises in consumer goods, especially food. Further irritation followed the publication of government studies indicating that consumer price indexes, to which many wages are pegged, are obsolete and misleading.

Communist-controlled labor organizations lagged somewhat behind in the agitation during the third quarter of 1963, but by late 1963 AITUC-affiliated unions had begun to take advantage of the situation to discredit INTUC leaders and actions. The Communists urged higher cost-of-living allowances, larger bonuses for workers, and suggested the nationalization of banks and other institutions.

Communist Position in Labor

The AITUC is India's oldest labor federation. It claims about a million members, although government authorities allow it a "verified" membership of only

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about half that much. Although the Communist Party as a whole lost some political support after the Chinese invasions, and on 9 April 1964 the pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions within the party reached the point of an open break, the AITUC leaders --who are mainly pro-Soviet in outlook--have been able to retain the allegiance of their followers and apparently have maintained their organization virtually intact. With the possible exception of AITUC unions in Calcutta, the party split is not likely to impair the effectiveness of the AITUC leaders' campaign.

Much of their success has also been due to their policy of concentrating on local labor issues and on developing pro-Communist union leaders from among the workers actually employed in industrial plants. Non-Communist union leaders, by contrast, are frequently outsiders, not actually employed in the plant, who have little knowledge of working conditions and who seek primarily to use worker support to further their political ambitions.

AITUC has become strongly entrenched in such strategic fields as ports, railways, posts and telegraphs, aircraft manufacturing, defense production, heavy industry, and electronics. Evidently the Communists now feel sufficiently confident of their strength to make a major bid to increase AITUC's influence.

As a political prelude, the Communist Party last September mobilized 50,000 persons from all over India for a mass march to present to Parliament a "Great Petition," allegedly signed by more than 10 million people, protesting against rising prices, high taxes, and enforced savings. The Communists presumably also hope to exploit weaknesses in the Congress Party's present leadership, the pressures being exerted on New Delhi by Pakistan and Communist China, and the evident shortcomings in India's Third Five-Year Plan.

The AITUC Campaign

The activities of AITUC during the past six months have aimed at both organizational expansion and more widespread agitation. Organizational efforts have included drives--as at the steel-producing center in Bhilai --seeking recognition of Communist unions as chief bargaining agents. Communist unions have also moved into areas neglected by INTUC as a result of its intramural jurisdictional disputes.

During December, efforts were under way to form new unions to compete with pro - Congress Party unions among the textile workers in Gujarat State, the Congress Party's oldest and largest labor stronghold. One Communist meeting held in Ahmedabad, Gujarat's capital, drew an attendance eight times as large as that at a simultaneous meeting being addressed by the then national labor minister, Gulzarilal Nanda.

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In the agitation field, AITUC in mid-December organized a conference to draw up new demands for raises in wages to match rising costs of living. Pro-Communist textile unions in Bombay on 13 and 14 December ordered 30,000 members to strike in protest against high prices and low wages. On 31 December they organized an impressive procession of 10,000 persons in Bombay in support of the same cause.

On 30 March, the Communist-dominated union at the government-controlled Heavy Electricals, Ltd., in Bhopal forced closure of the plant "for an indefinite period." The plant had been plagued by continuing unrest resulting from the Communist union's demands that it be recognized as representing a majority of workers. The unrest involved acts of indiscipline, intimidation, and sabotage in defiance of a government defense edict banning agitational activity for three months. Also last month, AITUC attempted a hunger strike in Calcutta.

One effect of these AITUC activities has been to cause Praja Socialist and Socialist Party leaders to attempt to maintain an equally high level of labor agitation among trade unions affiliated with those parties. Among other things, these leaders are discussing plans for a country-wide, one-day token strike this spring to protest price rises. The net result of these combined Communist and non-Communist efforts has been to raise the level of labor

agitation significantly throughout the country in recent months.

INTUC Troubles

INTUC is not now in a position to counter the Communist offensive, even though it is India's largest labor federation, claiming about 1.5 million adherents and with a government-verified membership of approximately a million. Although INTUC is formally independent of the Congress Party, it was founded by the party's labor wing and depends in large measure on protection and patronage by the Congress government in New Delhi.

At present, however, this affiliation with Congress is more a source of weakness than of strength. Throughout the postinvasion period of 1963, INTUC's leaders cooperated with the government in maintaining labor-management peace and in supporting unpopular new tax schemes. Since the national emergency is still legally in effect, INTUC still finds itself unable to challenge government policy on the three major issues agitating workers throughout the country--rising prices, high taxes, and low wages. Moreover, it has not benefited from the withdrawal of the unpopular compulsory "savings" scheme.

Furthermore, INTUC suffers from poor organization, absence of an attractive program, lack of a good propaganda machine, and, especially, from the same intense factionalism among its leaders as now characterizes

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much of the Congress Party. INTUC has never developed outstanding labor organizers. Its leaders, many of whom are primarily politicians rather than workers, have never attempted to develop a tight federation organization. There still are many independent unions sympathetic to the Congress Party who nevertheless compete with INTUC for workers' loyalties.

INTUC leaders in virtually every Indian state are engaged in petty quarrels and personal rivalries. In Madhya Pradesh, for example, the Indore mill workers' association, once a strong and well-administered organization, is being pulled apart by a contest between the president of the union and the state labor minister--once close associates in building state labor organizations. Not only have the two factions used considerable violence against each other, but the labor minister has alienated the loyalties of the union president's wife, who now is living with the minister.

In Madras, an INTUC national vice president is engaged in pirating members--sometimes with Communist help--away from well-established unions in Madras City.

In Bihar, the INTUC organization at the Tata Iron and Steel Corporation at Jamshedpur, long victim of a factional fight among its leaders, now is being manipulated by the state's Con-

gress chief minister, and there is a serious threat that it and dozens of other Bihar unions under the present leaders will be exposed to Communist take-over.

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The Communists are clearly the residual beneficiaries of INTUC's disarray, their own positive efforts aside. In Mysore State, for example, the Communists have moved into former INTUC strongholds among gold mine and coffee plantation workers, and in Bombay a minor political party allied with Congress felt compelled to establish a new textile workers' union because the crack-up of the INTUC organization left the field open to the Communists.

Unless INTUC's politically oriented leadership is able to get the Congress Party's house in order, the AITUC stands to make further gains. The US labor attaché in New Delhi believes the AITUC has an opportunity to make a major breakthrough. If it does so, there will be not only a further debilitating impact on the Indian Government's effort to build up military strength against the Chinese Communists, but Congress Party political leadership in India will have lost another source of grass-roots support.

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